

1942



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Scene: Führerbunker, 1940

A huge map of Europe dominates the wall. Hitler, in full dictator regalia, taps Moscow with a pointer. Mussolini lounges in a gilded chair, eating gelato noisily.

Hitler: I'm invading Russia.

Mussolini: *[jumps up, spilling gelato]* YAY! We're invading Russia!

Hitler: *[freezes pointer in mid-air]* No, no. I invade Russia. You... stay put. Guard the fort.

Mussolini: *[swells chest, declaims as though on stage]* We will make Moscow, deaf and grey, a bivouac of maniples!

Hitler: *[pinches the bridge of his nose like a man whose migraines have annexed Austria]* Dude. Albania? Greece? Remember?

Mussolini: *[twirling mustache that isn't there]* The steppe is ours! The snow, the frost, the tragic operas of ice!

Hitler: *[scrambles face with his hands, looking like a melting wax figure]*

The rest is already known. The Panzerdivisionen rolled east at full speed, steel on steel, the deadly Luftwaffe screaming overhead like Wagner's brass section on amphetamines. Troops advanced with both mosquito nets for the marshes and mountain gear for the Urals, prepared for anything, from malaria to frostbite.

And then came the Italians.

On foot. In cardboard shoes. Not metaphorical, no—literal cardboard, the sort that collapses after a drizzle, like a child’s school project trod upon by history.

And cavalry.

Not the modern cavalry you might suppose—the “cavalry” that is actually tanks, armored regiments, insignia poetic but hardware brutal.

No, no, no.

The *actual* cavalry. The one with horses. Animals. Hooves, tails, manes. Whinnying, stomping, chewing hay.

In 1941.

The age of radar, of Enigma machines, of aircraft carriers carving the oceans, of physicists already whispering about splitting the atom. And there—clip-clop, clip-clop—the proud Italian cavalry, charging into the 20th century with sabers that might as well have been spoons.

So. The Italian cavalry. On horses. Yes, still horses, we're not hallucinating. The Axis command, with a straight face, considered them a *military asset*. And thus they were deployed.

The mission: occupy "Spot Height 213.5."

Now, in the middle of the Russian steppe, "spot height 213.5" does not mean a noble mountain ridge or even a picturesque hill. It means precisely this: the tallest cow turd in a 40-kilometer radius, with the decimal place denoting the half-centimeter protrusion above the surrounding manure.

The strategic logic: plant a flag there, stand proud, and by sheer presence demonstrate to the Red Army that—sorry, gentlemen, this parking spot is taken.

But. Surprise.

By the time the horsemen clopped up in their cardboard boots, the Soviets had already noticed the towering landmark of Spot Height 213.5. Two full

battalions of infantry had occupied it during the night, and—because Russians do not play—had even dug in. Trenches. Sandbags. Machine-gun nests. Over a pile of cow shit.

What followed has entered, depending on your preferred bibliography, either the solemn history of military valor—or the equally solemn history of facepalm.

The Italians—were they brave? Were they hallucinating? Who can say?—took the order with absolute seriousness. Instead of calling in the Panzer divisions, the Luftwaffe, or *anyone* with steel and diesel, they decided to go into action themselves.

So, at first light of **August 24, 1942**—let us underline that again: **nineteen forty-two**, the year of aircraft carriers, radar, codebreaking machines, and jet prototypes—the Savoia Cavalleria actually charged.

Yes. At full gallop. With drawn sabers. Flying banners. Straight out of a John Ford western, except with more moustache wax and less Monument Valley.

The first Italian squadron numbered **100 horsemen**. The Soviets awaiting them were **2,500 infantry**, well dug-in, well-armed.

And yes—you must have guessed it. The Italians actually... won.

Full front. Three waves of horse-back cavalry slashing through the steppe like extras who'd ridden straight off the set of *Ben-Hur*. And 2,500 dug-in Soviet infantry, men who had stared down tanks and machine guns, dropped their weapons in sheer disbelief.

Because how else could it go?

The Russians—well, technically Siberians, but let's not split hairs—looked up from their trenches, rubbed their eyes, and said, in perfect Cyrillic:

“What the fuuuuck?”

And one must admire—deeply—the Soviet commander, who reportedly shrugged, lit a cigarette, and declared:

*“Nyet. Fuck it. I am
prepared to send my
men to crawl under
Panzers with grenades. I
am not—repeat, not—
reenacting Waterloo
2.0.”*

And now—the best part. The entire... Operation? Folly? Better-not-to-think-about-it?—had been followed, from a safe and astonished distance, by the Germans.

After the dust settled, after the Soviets surrendered in disbelief, a German detachment approached the victorious Italians. Their commander, monocle still rattling from what he'd just witnessed, saluted the Italian colonel and said, with Teutonic sincerity:

“Herr Oberst, this kind of thing... we cannot do anymore.”

The Italians, naturally, took this with the utmost pride. In Rome, the papers sang operatically: *“Cavalleria triumphs on the steppe!”* It was held up as proof that Italian martial spirit—hooves, sabers, banners—could shine even in the age of tanks and Stukas. For propaganda, it was a vintage year.

And today, among Italian military aficionados, it remains a tale of pride and tears. “The last cavalry charge!” they say, glasses misting, while videos of Spitfires and Tiger tanks play on loop in the background.

But to the rational mind, the German officer's comment still sounds less like praise, and more like an anthropologist—Zippo lighter in one pocket, laser pointer in the other—watching a Burmese tribesman make fire by rubbing sticks together and saying:

“Eh... really... we don't do it this way anymore.”

And so, dear listener, the next time you meet a horse—

Pat it. Tell it it's a good boy. Or a good girl. Horses don't care about your gender politics, only about sugar cubes.

Offer it an apple.

(Important footnote: open palm. Always. For the horse's teeth are involuntary razor-pliers forged in a moment of dark humor.)

And then, whisper a promise in its velvet ear:
That you will never, ever ride it against dug-in

infantry with machine guns. Not in 1942, not in
3042.

Put flowers in your guns.

Put apples in your horses.

Peace & Love.